Eat Smart & Move More

Wilson Sanchez

Nutrition for a healthy Baby

(Birth to 6 months)



Babies grow so quickly and their nutritional needs are constantly changing. Here are answers to important questions you may have about your baby’s nutrition.

**What should I feed my baby?**

* Breastmilk is the ideal food for babies, and breastfeeding offers many benefits to both mother and baby. Breastfeeding helps mother and baby form a special bond, and it helps the baby resist colds, ear infections, allergies, and other illnesses.
* It is best to breastfeed for the first 6 months of life, but breastfeeding even for just a few months or weeks is beneficial.
* If you think you may not be able to breastfeed (for example, you have conflicts with school or work or a medical condition), or you are worried about not producing enough breastmilk, talk to a health professional, breastfeeding specialist, or breastfeeding support group. They can answer your questions and help you come up with solutions. Your family and friends are also sources of support.

**Did you know?**

Breastfeeding is considered to be the most effective preventive means of reducing the death rate of children under five and the most complete source of foods from birth to 6 months for infants.

* If you decide to feed your baby infant formula, a health professional can help you choose the right kind and answer your questions about feeding.
* Cow’s milk, goat’s milk, and soy milk are not recommended until after your baby’s first birthday.

**How do I know if I am feeding my baby enough breastmilk?**

* Your baby may show she/he is still hungry by sucking, putting her hands in her mouth, opening and closing her/his mouth, or looking for the nipple. She/he may show she/he is full by falling asleep.
* Your baby will usually have 5 to 8 wet diapers and 3 or 4 stools per day by the time she/he is 5 to 7 days old.
* Your baby will be gaining weight. She/he should gain 5 to 7 ounces per week and should double her/his birthweight by 4 to 6 months of age.

**When and how should I introduce solid foods?**

* Introduce solid foods when your baby can sit with support and has good head and neck control.
* Offer iron-fortified rice cereal as the first solid food, because it is least likely to cause an allergic reaction, such as a rash. Offer a small amount (for example, 1 or 2 teaspoons) of one new food at a time. Wait 7 days or more to see how your baby tolerates the new food before introducing the next new food.
* Introduce solid foods in this order: iron- fortified infant cereal, fruits and vegetables, and meats.
* Avoid foods that may cause choking, such as hard candy, mini-marshmallows, popcorn, pretzels, chips, spoonful of peanut butter, nuts, seeds, large chunks of meat, hot dogs, raw car- rots, raisins and other dried fruits, and whole grapes.
* Do not add honey to food, water, or infant formula because it can be a source of spores that cause botulism, which can poison your baby.
* Do not add cereal to bottles, and do not use “baby food nurser kits” (which let solid foods filter through the bottle nipple along with the liquid). Your child may choke on the cereal.

**How do I avoid feeding my baby too much?**

* Learn how your baby shows she/he is hungry, and feed her/him when she/he is hungry.
* Feed your baby slowly. Do not enlarge the hole in the bottle nipple to make expressed breast- milk or infant formula come out faster.
* Do not add cereal to the bottle—this may cause your baby to eat more than she/he needs.
* Comfort your baby by talking to her/him and by cuddling, rocking, and walking her/him and not by feeding her/him. Using food to comfort your baby may teach her/him to use food as a source of comfort as she/he gets older.
* Feed your baby until she/he is full. It takes about 20 minutes for your baby to feel full. Do not force her/him to finish a bottle or other foods.

**Resources**

American Dietetic Association Phone: (800) 366-1655  
Web site: http://www.eatright.org

La Leche League International  
Phone: (800) 525-3243  
Web site: http://www.lalecheleague.org

USDA Food and Nutrition Information Center Phone: (703) 305-2554  
Web site: http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic